

# Raft, West and McQueen

...three of the best leave us

by Terry Dupuis

It is often claimed that tragedies occur in a cycle of three, and the past month has witnessed the passing of no fewer than three Hollywood legends: George Raft, Mae West and Steve McQueen.

George Raft was one of Hollywood's great quartet of 1930's actors whose name has come to be associated with the gangster films of that period. (The other three in this group were Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson.) Like those other actors, he played many other roles, but the gangster image persisted in the public's mind.

Raft was born in the Hell's Kitchen area of New York in 1895, and it was in this tough neighbourhood that he spent his formative years. He had numerous occupations before he went into the movies; at one time he was a nightclub dancer.

Raft's acting was generally panned by the critics, but audiences liked his tight-lipped poker face with its slight air of menace. His role as Paul Muni's coin-flipping gangster

friend in Scarface in 1932 launched him on a successful career in Hollywood. During the 30's and 40's he was one of tinseltown's highest-paid stars. But by the 50's he was appearing in mostly B-quality pictures, and in his later years he was only able to get cameo roles in pictures, mostly parodying his old image.

It is estimated that Raft made over 100 films. His best non-gangster role was that of a truck driver in *They Drive By Night*. He made quite a few other non-gangster films, but even in those he often had a shady background.

No one has ever claimed that George Raft was a versatile actor, least of all Raft himself. But his death still marks the passing of an actor who was a screen original.

Another definite screen original of the 30's was Mae West, who passed away two days prior to George Raft. Ironically, Raft had gotten his start back in 1932 in West's first film, *Night After Night*.

West was one of the most vulgar and overdressed leading ladies ever to appear on the screen. She became an archetypal sex

symbol. In fact she cashed in on it, and developed it as her screen persona. Her film scripts, most of which she wrote herself, were always heavy with double meanings. Her most famous line was "Come up and see me sometime."

Lewd and suggestive she may have been, but what endeared her to audiences was her air of self-mockery. She never seemed to take herself that seriously.

One of the best leading men she teamed with was Cary Grant in *She Done Him Wrong* (1933) and *I'm No Angel* (1933). But she also teamed up with the immortal W. C. Fields in 1940 for *My Little Chickadee*, and the result was a comedy classic.

Mae West came out of retirement in 1970 to appear in the film *Myra Breckinridge*. She also did a lot of stage appearances and she was fond of giving interviews. In 1959 she published her autobiography, entitled "Goodness Had Nothing To Do With It."

The most tragic of the recent Hollywood

deaths was that of Steve McQueen. Having just turned 50, he was three decades younger than both Raft and West. Ironically, McQueen had been inactive on screen in recent years, and he had just come out of retirement in the last year to make two films: *Tom Horn* and *The Hunter*. There is also an unreleased project made over 4 years ago called *Enemy of the People*.

Steve McQueen's screen heros more often than not were loners. Among his most famous roles of this type were the parts he played in *Papillon*, *Bullitt*, *The Sand Pebbles*, *The Magnificent Seven*, and *The Great Escape*.

McQueen started out in television in the late 50's in a popular western television series called "Wanted: Dead Or Alive." His role in that series was a bounty hunter. Ironically, his career went full circle. In his last film before his death, *The Hunter* he played a modern-day bounty hunter. It was a fitting screen farewell for one of Hollywood's most rugged stars.



## Meet the Beatles

It was a big day for students at Midland Secondary School, Friday, as the Beatles chose to reunite for their Christmas assembly. Actually, the fellows were Grade 13 students at MSS but the hysteria was the same as if the Beatles had actually appeared on stage. From left: Jerry Richard, Steve Friesen, Mike Achilles and Todd Clarke.

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